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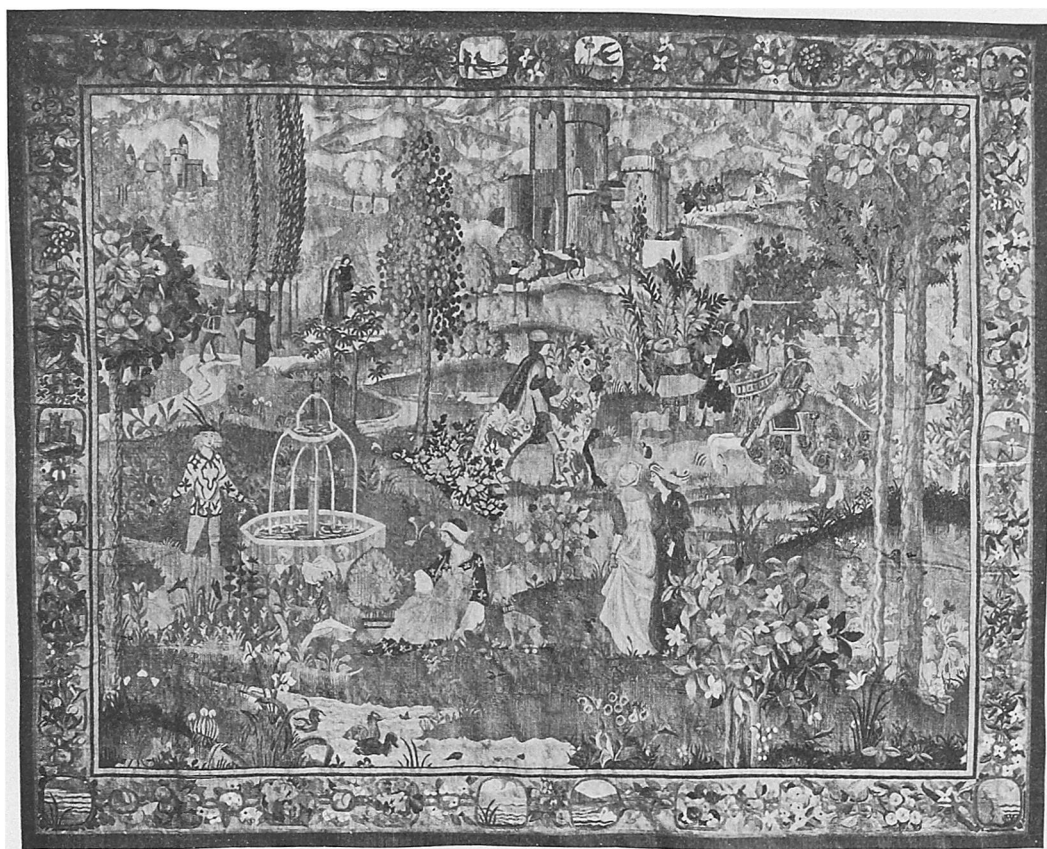
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LARGE WALL TAPESTRY ILLUSTRATING
THE LEGEND OF "THE POT OF BASIL"

—Courtesy Herter Looms

Herter Looms Revive an Ancient Art

OF all the displays of the recent exhibition of Industrial Art, none was so extensive or magnificent as that of the Herter Looms, whose exhibition, occupying one entire room, fitted with their products from carpet to lighting fixtures, was thronged with visitors of taste and social distinction throughout the two weeks of the Industrial Art event.

It was worthy of the attention it excited, for here was gathered one of the most notable collections of textiles woven in America ever assembled into one artistic scheme of decoration. It was a room to make the

visitor gasp with astonishment and sigh with satisfaction. Could it indeed be possible that these magnificent tapestries with all the appearance of fourteenth century antiques, this rich Aubusson carpet, these apparently antique furnishings and lovely hangings, like nothing else in the world, were the products of American enterprise, representing an industry not yet ten years old!

How lovely, rich and reposeful was this room, what an impression of blues one carried from it. soft blues, soothing yet warm, if such could be, blues that were gracious



ONE OF A PAIR OF GOTHIC WALL
TAPESTRIES —Courtesy Herter Looms

and restful, mingled with tones of gold and faun and exquisite touches of rose. This was the famous Herter blue, but is there not also a Herter gold and rose, or was it merely singularly agreeable combinations that lent this impression of individuality?

The most impressive features of the collection were the two large wall tapestries, approximately ten by twelve feet, representing "The Flight of the Duchess" from Browning's poem and the story of "The Pot of Basil." These indeed are the masterpieces of the Herter Looms. Two Gothic panels, four by nine, one adorned with the figure of a woman, and the other of a figure of a man, each attended by a grotesque and decorative Griffin were also most interesting.

A pair of doorway curtains and a lunette for the semicircular transom above, pre-

sented something absolutely new in the weaver's art, an invention of the artist originator of this industry. Upon the warp, stretched as for the usual tapestry operations, a gorgeous and fanciful pattern involving a Chinese junk in the choppy waves of an Oriental sea lively with fishes, against a background of tropical foliage and rare birds, had been woven in the usual close fabric of tapestry. The open spaces, filled only with the threads of the warp, gave an indescribable effect of transparency, comparable only to the best stained glass, but surpassing even that in the rich and gracious quality which it imparted to the strained and diffused sunlight. In adding this style of weaving to the treasures of tapestry making, Mr. Herter has achieved a triumph which should cause his name to live long in tradition as a master of the art.

Tapestry might be said to occupy an intermediate position between fine and decorative art, leaning in fact toward the former, since, in the beginning, it very generally aspired to be representative, even though it had sprung from the humble craft of the weaver, bent upon supplying wrappings and curtains against the cold. Of all the arts nothing is more delightful, more suggestive of the glory and romance of the past.

Weaving, like pottery, is one of the most ancient of the arts and crafts. No one can say when the idea of twisting together threads and strands of wool, linen or silk originated, and the very antiquity of the industry imparts a charm. The fable of Arachne and of the three fates, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, and the Homeric story of Penelope's web are the contributions of Greece to the legends of weaving. It is an art which has supplied us with similes and metaphors, such expressions as "The Web of Life," "The Thread of Fate," "The Wheel of Destiny," "The Weaving of a Tale," or "The Spinning of a Yarn," show how deeply rooted in ancient traditions, customs and speech is this handicraft of the deft of fingers.

Before painting had assumed supremacy as a representative art, pictures were woven and embroidered upon textiles for useful or decorative purposes. Side by side with painting, tapestry weaving rose to importance, the golden age of the two arts falling in much the same times and countries. The very limitations of the materials and processes resulted in individual colors and conventions which have added dignity and charm to the masterpieces of weaving. There is something rich and enduring about tapestry; indeed nothing with the possible exception of pottery, better withstands the wear and tear of time. It has a wealth of associations with old castles and days of romance, which makes the true aesthetic feel an almost personal affection for it.

At one time in the world's history its fashioning was an industry of no mean importance, the cities of Ghent and Louvain, of Ypres, Bruges and Arras employing thousands of workers during the fourteenth century. These same towns, now pillaged and desolated by war, where the booming of cannon has lately reverberated, then thrilled with the humming of many looms and the working songs of the weavers. Ghent had twenty-seven streets occupied by tapestry looms and Louvain numbered fifty thousand weavers among her inhabitants. Arras and Bruges were greatest of all, however, and masters of painting even to the great Raphael, turned their talents toward making cartoons for the looms. The textiles of the low countries were the most beautiful and tasteful products of the art and the name Flemish stands for all that is best in tapestry. In reviving this art in our own day and age, Albert Herter, the great mural painter, turned with unerring taste and discrimination to the products of the Flemish golden age for inspiration. This art had long languished in the home of its most brilliant victories, until the most desirable things in tapestry were in the form of priceless antiques with only a few, even of the

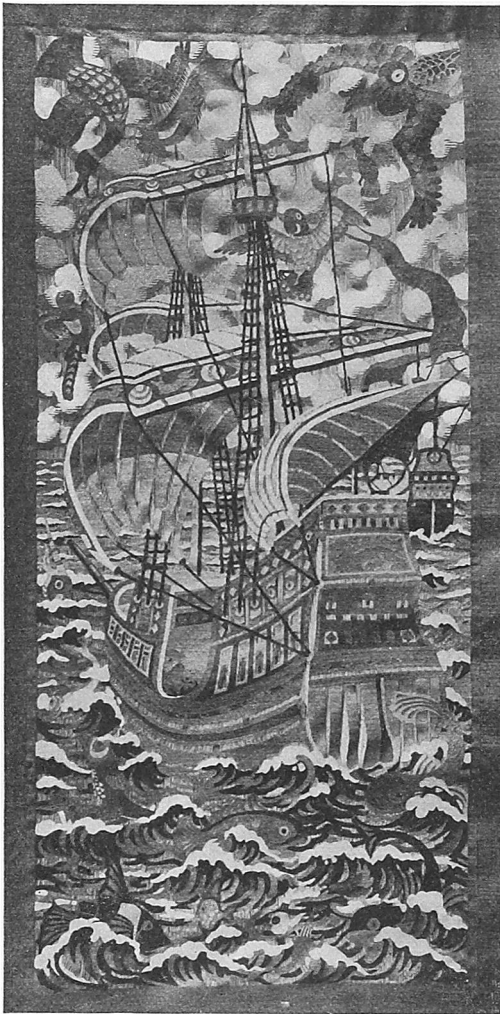


ONE OF A PAIR OF GOTHIC WALL
TAPESTRIES —Courtesy Herter Looms

rich, might possess since there was not a supply sufficient to meet the demands of modern decorators.

Mr. Herter's interest in tapestry was aroused at a psychological moment when many magnificent homes were in the building. Seldom in the history of the world has such an era of home building on an elegant and elaborate scale been witnessed as that which has taken place of late years in the United States. Fortunes and tastes have grown to regal standards, almost within a generation and a more opportune time for the revival of an art aiming at the embellishment of the home could not have been chosen.

That the founder of the Herter Looms should have foreseen a reproduction of the



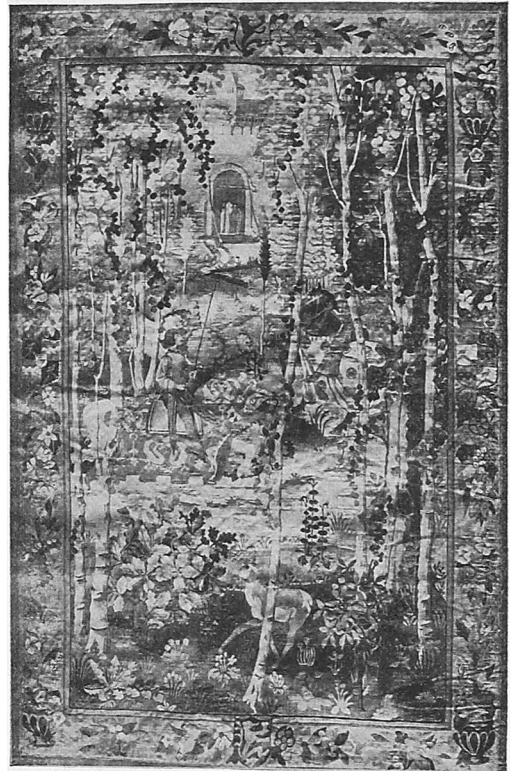
DOORWAY CURTAIN IN THE NEW
TRANSPARENT TAPESTRY

—Courtesy Herter Looms

conditions of the romance centuries in America, speaks volumes for his insight. However, it would be too much to credit Mr. Herter with a sudden and fixed determination to revive a great art in America since this ambition has grown with experiment, his original incursion into the realm of weaving having been largely in the nature of a diversion, from painting, which was at that time his more serious pursuit. Tapestry at first fascinated, then illumined and finally inspired to great achievement. Herter tapestries, which are treasures even

in our own day, will be heirlooms of tomorrow, and our only regret is that we cannot say that they are the work throughout of native craftsmen, since Mr. Herter has been obliged to bring many of his best workers from those countries in the old world where tapestry making is a matter of age long tradition. This, however, has always been the case with every founder of an artistic industry in any land. At first the craft draws its artisans from the original source of inspiration, but gradually there creeps into the work the note of the new nationality which has adopted it and it evolves something new to add to the treasures of its tradition.

In the case of American tapestries Mr. Herter's transparent effects, with patterns woven upon the warp, and the simple hangings devoid of pattern, except as the loose open stitch is in itself a species of design, or ornamented with plain bands and stripes of



A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF HERTER WALL
TAPESTRY

—Courtesy Herter Looms

contrasting color are undoubtedly America's contribution to this textile art. Another new and pleasing effect was achieved by weaving borders of the regular tapestry upon the hangings of the plain weave. These beautiful draperies for curtains, couch covers and the like, are soft and pliable with a distinctive brilliance which is achieved through the use of artificial wood pulp silk. This on account of its superior luster is preferred above real silk for the purpose of hangings and draperies. Chair coverings, upholstery and tapestries are of course carried out in silk or wool, upholstery fabrics being sometimes executed in combinations of wool and mercerized cotton.

The writer's attention was first attracted to these weavings in the curtains of a smart shop where hand beaten silver is sold. A fabric closely resembling spun silver in dull hand burnished effects had been achieved with the loom, a remarkably appropriate drapery for the shop and its wares. Other curtains of this kind seen at the exhibition were in gold and rose brown tones, the combination producing a similarly metallic effect, with the suggestion of bronze or copper. There were also blue and gold combinations which called to mind a room with old Chinese rugs and English black lacquer furniture with gold decoration as their logical field of greatest aesthetic achievement.

Heavy, honest, homespun effects in still deeper blue applied to back and seat of straight old Tudor chairs and lovely cream and rose weavings of silk in graceful floral designs provided as upholstery material for delicately turned French furniture, demonstrated the breadth of possibility of these weavings. These were set upon an Aubusson carpet of soft grayish green with a border in blue cream and rose, a magnificent creation which it had cost \$1,300 to produce.

Polychrome furniture, too, was one of the features of this display which came as a pleasing surprise to the beauty loving.

The chairs, cabinets and lamp bases in this style are difficult to describe, inasmuch as they present such a variety of tones without in any way suggesting color, as we usually visualize the word. They impress one at first as antique Italian pieces, from which time has removed the gilding in some places while supplying various touches of mottled tones in others. The gold is often backed up with vermillion, as was the custom with early Florentine furniture makers. Though many toned these pieces are rich and subdued in effect and blend to perfection with the gracious products of the looms.

Antique Persian pottery contributed another harmonious note to this exhibition, its original glazes being toned to the same key as the Herter blues, grays and golds. Time had imparted traces of iridescence to render the harmony more complete. Many of these vases had been fitted up as lamps and crowned with the artistic wood pulp shades of the Herter studios. These shades are the work of artists throughout, from design to execution. They are of perforated and cut-stenciled English wood pulp, painted in watercolors and gold and lined and interlined with silk. This silk, as it appears through the intricacies of the cut-out pattern, is shaded and tinted in floral, fruit or conventional motifs. The joining of the sections and the edging of the shade at top and bottom is accomplished with gold laces and galloons which frame the panels appropriately and complete a harmonious composition. The making of these shades has grown to be an important department with the Herter studios.

This institution of aesthetics now occupies the beautiful old paternal mansion of Mr. Herter at Madison avenue and Seventieth street, New York City, where rooms fitted up in these productions and appropriate accompanying appointments offer inspirations of unrivaled loveliness to the householder bent upon the making of a beautiful home.